

Christ's Baptismal Mandate and Institution and Baptism's Liturgy in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod of North America

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of the World Council of Churches's *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* can be seen as the apex of the movement toward a universal Christian statement on the doctrine and practice of Baptism since the World Council, given its present bent toward syncretism, is unlikely in the immediate future to produce anything like it. With respect to holy Baptism this document shows the readiness of Christian communions to arrive at a universal baptismal liturgy. To investigate how far this has been achieved in Christendom *Baptism and Eucharist: Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration* (1983) was published by the World Council of Churches as its Faith and Order Paper No 117.¹ At the end of the first section of this book, which exhibits the baptismal liturgies then in use among the various denominations of Christendom, a Lima Liturgy of Holy Baptism is offered to the church.

Because our Lord has left His church a mandate and institution of holy Baptism with history preserving a liturgical tradition, it would prove helpful to examine modern liturgies in the light of Baptism's mandate, institution, and tradition. Normative for evaluative purposes in orthodox Christianity would be the Holy Scriptures, which comprise Jesus Christ's mandate and institution of Baptism along with His apostles' interpretation thereof.

The importance of comparing present day liturgies with the church's ancient, medieval, and modern liturgical tradition is also indicated in the "givenness"—the ἐδόθη *“edothē”* in mandate and institution—of holy Baptism itself. The Christian Church is continually generated and grows by her Lord's gift to her of Baptism. Mindful of this the church should be careful when adding to or removing elements of Baptism's Liturgy, recognizing its givenness (*edothē*) by both the Lord and sacred history.

The new baptismal liturgy of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will provide this study with a look at a recently published baptismal liturgy. This liturgy provides an instance of remaining faithful with what might be considered the least amount of liturgy “necessary.” As one studies this liturgy, one wonders that there was the need to provide an order for “Emergency Baptism” in that the regular order would scarcely take much more time. Both of these liturgies have been appended to the text of this study for ease of reference.

¹Max Thurian and Geoffrey Wainwright, eds., *Baptism and Eucharist: Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration*, Faith and Order Paper 117 (Geneva: WCC, 1983), 94-96.

HOLY BAPTISM'S MANDATE and INSTITUTION

Happily the church has a dominical mandate and institution enscriptured for her in the Gospel according to St. Matthew (28:16-20). The authority with which the church has held this mandate and institution as well as its first century provenance is witnessed to in the most ancient of liturgical documents, i.e. the *Didache*:

And as touching baptism, thus baptize ye: when ye have first recited all these things, baptize in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit²

There was no confusion about *formulae baptismi* then!

The risen Lord Jesus Christ comes to His eleven apostles on the mountain He directed them to journey to. He gives them the mandate: “Given to Me is all authority in heaven and upon [the] earth. Therefore, after you have gone out, disciple all the nations, by baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, by teaching them to keep all that I have bid you; and see! I am with you all the days until the close of the age.”

The mandate³ is to μαθητεύσατε (make disciples) of all the nations. He specifies the means of making all the nations disciples: baptizing and teaching. It is the baptizing that most specifically concerns us here; however, He does not mandate the exact mode of baptism.

To get an idea of what is going on in the action of baptizing linguistic and archeological study is helpful, but should never be considered normative!⁴ Exegesis of the New Testament helps us dispense with the narrower classical definition of βαπτίζειν: “dip, plunge.”⁵ The Koine Greek uses the word generally of washing. St. Mark’s digression is helpful here: “. . . and there are many other [baptisms], which they received to hold fast, baptisms of cups and of pitchers and of copper vessels and of dining couches” (7:4).⁶ Archeology has shown us that these dining couches could only be conveniently dipped in water with the use of 20th century cranes as they were in many cases large stone blocks. The *Didache* is again helpful:

²Ibid., 1; for the full text of the *Didache* in English see Alexander Roberts, et. al., eds. and trans., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, 9 vols., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 7:369-83.

³This word helpfully comes to us by way of the Latin translation of this text: “*baptizantes eos in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus sancti: docentes eos servare omnia quaecumque mandavi vobis*” [Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine*, (London: United Bible Societies, 1969), 83].

⁴This is a grave shortcoming of Edmund Schlink’s otherwise helpful *Doctrine of Holy Baptism*, see below.

⁵Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940), 305-06.

⁶Barbara and Kurt Aland, et al., *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed., (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 110. This latest edition has chosen to retain καὶ κλινῶν in the body of the text, although in square brackets: it is the *lectio difficilior*.

. . . in running water. But if thou hast not running water, baptize in other water; and if thou canst in cold, then in warm. And if thou hast not either, *pour forth water thrice upon the head*, in the Name of . . .⁷

C.F.W. Walther, however, enunciates the general principle of excluding all doubt as to one's being baptized that might be introduced into the mode of baptism by an all too sparing use of water:

It is intentionally not said that every form of sprinkling is a valid form of Baptism. Only continual sprinkling is a valid form. If the sprinkling is done in such a way that one hardly knows whether water has really been applied to the one to be baptized, such an alleged Baptism is not to be considered valid. In the Constitution of the Consistory at Wittenberg, which Luther composed with several other theologians, it says: "The abuse that some do not dip the children into the water nor pour it on them, but only wipe a little drop on the body or the forehead, should by no means be observed."⁸

While the New Testament usage of the words βαπτίζειν and βάπτισμα is wide enough to include any washing, the washing of Holy Baptism is not just any washing. Water by itself is not Holy Baptism. Nowhere is this more succinctly set forth than in Luther's Small Catechism:

What is Baptism? Answer. Baptism is not only mere [*schlecht*, Latin: *simpliciter*] water, but it is the water, grasped in God's mandate [*Gebot*, Latin: *mandato*] and joined with God's word.⁹

Then comes the divine mandate and institution (Matthew 28:19) as "such word of God." This terse answer excludes the idea that water itself is endowed with any sanctifying virtue as that of misguided patristic and medieval thinking¹⁰ as well as the idea of the Zwinglians that Holy Baptism validly administered is nothing at all but water. It is water used as the Lord Jesus has mandated and instituted it, i.e. baptizing [a human being] into [εἰς] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Outside of its mandated and instituted use it was no longer Holy Baptism; hence, it could no longer offer its user sanctification of any kind. Doubt is introduced.

The mandate and institution of Christ alone constitute Holy Baptism. Edmund Schlink is not standing on solid ground when he implies that the divine mandate and institution is insufficient:

. . . the concept of institution in the doctrine of Baptism cannot be restricted to the transmission of the baptismal command. The concept of institution must either be broadened so as to include the Old

⁷Whitaker, *op. cit.*, 1; emphasis added.

⁸Dr. C.F.W. Walther, *Walther's Pastoral that is American Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, trans. John M. Drickamer (New Haven, Missouri: Lutheran News, Inc., 1995), 90.

⁹*Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche: Herausgegeben im Gedenkjahr der Augsburgischen Konfession 1930*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 515.24-27 [hereinafter: *BKS*].

¹⁰The words of the catechism could be applied to the uses that "holy water" were put to in the church of Luther's day and age, e.g. to "baptize" bells and other items appointed for use in church and supposedly to cure leprosy (SA III.XV.4,5; Tract. 73; FCSD VII.87; *BKS* 462.9-16, 493.13-17, 1001.30-35). Such practices might be considered superstition and detrimental to the proper understanding of the Lord's mandate and institution.

Testament antecedents and the history of Jesus Christ, or it must be replaced by the concept of logical defense.¹¹

While all of these biblical antecedents and attendants can be illuminating and helpful to the Christian, he must be directed to nothing more or less than the Lord's divine mandate and institution.

The Lord adds to His mandate and institution of Holy Baptism the promise of eternal life (Mark 16:15-16: “And He said to them, ‘When you go out into all the world, proclaim the gospel to all the creation. The one who believed and has been baptized will be saved, and the one who disbelieved will be condemned’”).¹²

One can leave aside the critics’ problem with the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20 by making the point that the passage in question was recognized as homolegoumena by the church, and even if it may be considered antilegomena, the content of the two verses in question are substantiated by Matthew 28:16-20 and John 3:3-5: eternal life is promised by the Lord to the one who believes and is baptized.

This promise of salvation is clearly stated in the Large Catechism:

Just so, if we had nothing more than these words, “Go and baptize,” we would still have to accept and observe Baptism as an ordinance [*Ordnung*] of God. But here we have not only God’s commandment and injunction [*Gepot und Befehl*], but also his promise [*Verheißung*]. Therefore, it is far more glorious than anything else God has commanded and ordained; in short, it is so full of comfort and grace that heaven and earth cannot comprehend it.¹³

We can conclude by saying that the Lord’s mandate, institution, and promise afford Holy Baptism with the distinction that it

effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it as the word and promise of God read [in Mark 16:16].¹⁴

APOSTOLIC INSTRUCTION

The holy apostles have enlarged upon their Lord's mandate and institution with no less astounding claims for His Holy Baptism:

forasmuch, also, as the holy Apostles of the Lord have written: The promise is unto you and to your children, and again: Baptism doth also now save us¹⁵

¹¹Edmund Schlink, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, trans. Herbert J.A. Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 12.

¹²καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς: πορευθέντες εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει. ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται, ὁ δὲ ἄπιστῆσας κατακριθήσεται, Aland, op. cit., 148.

¹³Theodore G. Tappert et al., trans. & ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 441.38-39; BKS, 699.6-15.

¹⁴Sie wirkt Vergebung der Sunden, erlöset vom Tod und Teufel und gibt die ewigen Seligkeit allen, die es gläuben, wie die Wort und Verheißung Gottes lauten (SC IV, 6 in BKS, 515.38-516.2).

¹⁵Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference, *The Lutheran Agenda* (Saint Louis: Concordia, [1948]), 2.

In the Book of Acts Holy Baptism is seen to be employed by the apostles in their doing their Lord's bidding to make disciples (Matthew 28:19): St. Peter's Pentecost hearers ask, "τί ποιήσωμεν; [What shall we do?]," as does the Philippian jailer "τί με δεῖ ποιεῖν ἵνα σωθῶ; [What must I do in order that I may be saved?]" (Acts 2:37; 16:30b). They are baptized. Of course this is coupled with God-given repentance and faith, which also accords perfectly with the Lord's mandate and institution (Mark 16:16). The apostle Paul begins his salutary ministry in being baptized by Ananias, who declares: "And now, why are you delaying? Arise. Be baptized and wash away your sins as you call upon His name."¹⁶

The apostle Paul gives us a certain idea why Holy Baptism washes away sin when he characterizes it as the washing of regeneration which justifies as an instrument of God's grace in Jesus Christ:

But when the kindness and the philanthropy of God our Savior appeared, He saved us not by deeds in righteousness that we ourselves did; but, on the contrary, according to His mercy through [the] washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, in order that having been justified by His grace we might become heirs according to [the] hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7).¹⁷

These words appear as poetry in the Nestle-Aland text, so they may have constituted a hymn for Holy Baptism. The chrisom cloth put upon the baptizand is nothing else than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself along with His righteousness: "for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27)."¹⁸ Being clothed with Christ entails being clothed with His righteousness that is reckoned to the baptized believer by faith.

Christ's righteousness imparted in Holy Baptism is declared as His death and resurrection in the central Romans 6 passage:

Then what will we say? Shall we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? May it never be! How will we, who died to sin, still live in it? Or do you not know: as many [of us] as have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-4).¹⁹

¹⁶or perhaps: "what are you about [to do]? Having arisen, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name." καὶ νῦν τί μέλλεις; ἀναστὰς βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλυσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ (Acts 22:16), Aland, op. cit., 390

¹⁷ ὅτε δὲ ἡ χρηστότης καὶ ἡ φιλανθρωπία ἐπεφάνη τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν θεοῦ, οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ἃ ἐποιήσαμεν ἡμεῖς ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου, οὗ ἐξέχεεν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς πλουσίως διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν, ἵνα δικαιωθέντες τῇ ἐκείνου χάριτι κληρονόμοι γενηθῶμεν κατ' ἐλπίδα ζωῆς αἰωνίου, *ibid.*, 559.

¹⁸ ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε, *ibid.*, 498.

¹⁹ Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ἐπιμένωμεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, ἵνα ἡ χάρις πλεονάσῃ; μὴ γένοιτο. οἵτινες ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, πῶς ἔτι ζήσομεν ἐν αὐτῇ; ἢ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι, ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν; συνετάφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον, ἵνα ὥσπερ ἠγέρθη Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν διὰ τῆς δόξης τοῦ πατρὸς, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καὶνότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν, *ibid.*, 418.

Holy Baptism delivers the crucified, dead, buried, and risen Christ with all His benefits to the baptizand to be received by faith. The situation is like that of a dead individual raised again to life: the justified baptizand has created within him a new nature that battles with his old sinful nature. Holy Baptism empowers the baptizand to put to death his old self through daily contrition and repentance that the new nature might come to the fore as he lives the Christian life. This same teaching comes to the fore as the successor to Old Testament circumcision, the “circumcision done without hands”:

In whom [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision done without hands in the putting off of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in Baptism, in which you also were jointly raised through faith by the operation of God who raised Him from the dead (Colossians 2:11-12).²⁰

Pleonastically for emphasis, the apostle identifies Holy Baptism with the Christian's justification and sanctification: “and some of you were these [evil doers]; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11).²¹

Turning to the instruction of another of the apostles, St. Peter: in his epistolary treatise that is thought by some scholars to be a homily on Holy Baptism, i.e. 1 Peter, he makes the bald assertion that Holy Baptism *saves* the Christian:

[Christ] . . . preached to the spirits in prison, once disobedient when the forbearance of God awaited patiently in [the] days of Noah while the ark was being constructed, into which few, that is eight souls, were saved through water. Which [water as the] antitype Baptism now also saves us, not removal of the flesh's dirt but a good conscience' appeal to God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at [the] right of God, having gone into heaven with angels, authorities, and powers subjected to Him (1 Peter 3:19-22).²²

The baptizand's conscience is washed clean to become a good conscience. Holy Baptism's connection with Christ's resurrection is again declared.

The apostolic author of the letter to the Hebrews speaks of Holy Baptism as the means of cleansing the hearts of those who through the blood of Christ enter into the presence of God:

²⁰Ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετμήθητε περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνεγέρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, *ibid.*, 526.

²¹καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε· ἀλλὰ ἀπελούσασθε, ἀλλὰ ἡγιάσθητε, ἀλλὰ ἐδικαιώθητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν, *ibid.*, 449.

²²[Χριστός] . . . ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν, ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὁκτὼ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος. ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅς ἐστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ [τοῦ] θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανόν ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων, *ibid.*, 604-05.

Therefore, brethren, having confidence for the entrance of the holy places in the blood of Jesus, which [entrance] He opened for us as a way, new and living, through the sanctuary curtain, that is His flesh, and [having] a great high priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience and the body having been washed with pure water; let us hold fast the unwavering confession of hope, for the one who promised is faithful . . . (Hebrews 10:19-23).²³

In the context of Christ's spousal relationship with His church the apostle Paul identifies Holy Baptism as the means that Christ employs to cleanse His church from any spiritual blemishes:

Husbands, love [your] wives, just as even Christ loved the church and delivered Himself up for her, in order that He might sanctify her, having cleansed [her] by the washing of the water in [the] word, in order that He Himself might present the church to Himself glorious, not having stain or wrinkle or any of the like, but that she may be holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25-27).²⁴

In this passage Holy Baptism is designated by its components: washing with water and the word. It is declared to be the Lord's own action of rendering His church holy and blameless: free from stain, wrinkle or the like. Holy Baptism is His action of presenting His church before Himself as His holy bride. In doing this He affords her the benefit of His having delivered Himself up as the propitiatory sacrifice. The Lord's vicarious satisfaction is indicated by the Greek preposition "ὑπέρ." In the same way as Holy Baptism may be seen as the adoption of the baptizand as a son into the family of God, it may also be seen as the marriage of the church to Her Lord—her becoming the bride of Christ.

Holy Baptism is the Holy Spirit's instrument to give the baptizand entrance into the church as the body of Christ:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and while all the members of the body are many, there is one body, so also is Christ; for also in one Spirit we ourselves all were baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free men, we all also were made to drink one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).²⁵

The apostle Paul emphasizes the singleness of Holy Baptism as the inception of the Christian life: Christian Baptism is single and unique in contradistinction to other "baptisms," particularly Jewish ceremonial washings, and single and unrepeatable for the individual Christian:

²³Ἐχοντες οὖν, ἀδελφοί, παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ, ἣν ἐνεκαίνισεν ἡμῖν ὁδὸν πρόσφατον καὶ ζῶσαν διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἱερέα μέγαν ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ, προσερχώμεθα μετὰ ἀληθινῆς καρδίας ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πίστεως ῥεραντισμένοι τὰς καρδίας ἀπὸ συνειδήσεως πονηρᾶς καὶ λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ· κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος ἀκλινῇ, πιστὸς γὰρ ὁ ἐπαγγειλάμενος, *ibid.*, 578.

²⁴Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπάτε τὰς γυναῖκας, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς, ἵνα αὐτὴν ἁγιασῇ καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι, ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἑνδοξὸν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ἔχουσαν στίλβον ἢ ῥυτίδα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων, ἀλλ' ἵνα ᾖ ἁγία καὶ ἄμωμος, *ibid.*, 512.

²⁵Καθάπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα ἓν ἐστίν καὶ μέλη πολλὰ ἔχει, πάντα δὲ τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος πολλὰ ὄντα ἓν ἐστίν σῶμα, οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστός· καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν, εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνες εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ πάντες ἐν πνεύμα ἐποτίσθημεν, *ibid.*, 461.

. . . being eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; [there is] one body and one Spirit, just as you were also called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. And to each one of us is given the grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Ephesians 4:3-7).²⁶

In conclusion we can sum up the apostles' instruction by confessing with them that Holy Baptism is the Lord's own salutary washing of the individual by which is united to him His entire person and work. Holy Baptism brings the Christian into the entire sweep of the Lord's history of salvation, and it is fittingly extolled in the church's normative exposition of the word of the apostles:

In Baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and to practice all his life. He always has enough to do to believe firmly what Baptism promises and brings—victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts. In short, the blessings of Baptism are so boundless that if timid nature considers them, it may well doubt whether they could all be true. . . . No greater jewel, therefore, can adorn our body and soul than Baptism, for through it we obtain perfect holiness and salvation, which no other kind of life and no work on earth can acquire.²⁷

HOLY BAPTISM'S WISCONSIN LUTHERAN LITURGY

When one has grown up with *The Lutheran Hymnal* with its recension of the Common Service on pages 5 and 15, one can see the rationale for the form that the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's Liturgy of Holy Baptism.²⁸ In the same way as the Service of Confession had been shortened to fit in neatly at the beginning of the *Hauptgottesdienst*, so the Liturgy of Holy Baptism has been customized as an occasional prologue to the main Sunday divine service. The General Confession and Absolution has been introduced into the baptismal liturgy to insure its normal position at the inception of the service and expeditious flow of the same. The inclusion of a confession of sins in the baptismal liturgy is a novelty introduced by this new order. The first rubric appeals to Luther.

²⁶σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης· Ἐν σῶμα καὶ ἐν πνεῦμα, καθὼς καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν· εἷς κύριος, μία πίστις, ἓν βάπτισμα, εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πάσιν. Ἐνὶ δὲ ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *ibid.*, 508-09.

²⁷Tappert, *op. cit.*, 441-42.41,42,46: *Darümb hat ein iglicher Christen sein Leben lang gnug zu lernen und zu uben an der Taufe; denn er hat immerdar zu schaffen, daß er festiglich gläube, was sie zusagt und bringet: Überwindung des Teufels und Tods, Vergebung der Sunde, Gottes Gnade, den ganzen Christum und heiligen Geist mit seinem Gaben. Summa, es ist so überschwänglich, daß, wenn's die blöde Natur bedenket, sollt' sie zweifeln, ob es künnde wahr sein. . . . Darümb haben wir an unser Leib und Seele kein größer Kleinod. Denn dadurch werden wir gar heilig und selig, welchs sonst kein Leben, kein Werk auf Erden erlangen kann* (BKS, 699.27-37, 700.14-18).

²⁸See Appendix below, pp. 23-25.

Initially we can thank God that the liturgical abridger has not removed the “Holy” from Holy Baptism, which indicates that it is the holy Lord’s mandate and institution. Unfortunately they have removed it from the “cross” as the sign of it is placed upon the baptizand.²⁹ This is an disappointing omission.

The opening address serves double duty as an explanation of the need for Holy Baptism and an exhortation to confession of sins. This may be considered helpful in showing how the confession of sins is a use one makes of one’s baptism in accordance with the Small Catechism’s fourth question. The answer to which is put into the mouths of the congregation. This setting, however, removes the due attention from the baptismal party. Instead of being the initiating of the Liturgy of Holy Baptism it is more apparently a call to the general confession. It should be noted in passing that the formula of absolution omits a reference to the confessor’s being ordained. This renders this formula deficient.

We note with disappointment that the laying on of the pastor’s hand with the Lord’s Prayer has been omitted from its ancient place. In the Lutheran liturgical tradition the Lord’s Prayer has been a part of all sacred rites in which it is understood that the Lord is the one doing them, viz. Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and Holy Ordination. The saving of time must have been the motivating factor here as well as the bother of having the Lord’s Prayer appear twice in the Common Service.

Now follows the truncated “Sacrament of Baptism.” The use of sponsors has been eliminated from the prebaptismal liturgy for children as well as the abrenuncio³⁰ altogether. This seems to disregard Luther’s characterization of Holy Baptism in his preface/afterward to his orders of Holy Baptism:

Remember, therefore, that it is no joke to take sides against the devil and not only to drive him away from the little child, but to burden the child with such a mighty and lifelong enemy. Remember, too, that it is very necessary to aid the poor child with all you heart and strong faith, earnestly to intercede for him that God, in accordance with this prayer, would not only free him from the power of the devil, but also strengthen him, so that he may nobly resist the devil in life and death.³¹

In the M[inister’s] declaration³² in the case of the baptism of children there is no clear ascription of sin to the child as we have in the Missouri Synod agenda of 1948—unfortunately the agenda of 1984 has omitted a more

²⁹See below, p. 24.

³⁰Renunciation of Satan

³¹Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: American Edition*, ed. Jaroslav Jan. Pelikan, and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-86), 53:102; *Darumb wolltest Du bedenken, wie gar nicht ein Scherz ist, wider den Teufel handeln und denselben nicht allein von dem Kindlin jagen, sonder auch dem Kindlin solchen mächtigen Feind sein Leben lang auf den Hals laden, daß es wohl not ist, dem armen Kindlin aus ganzem Herzen und starkem Glauben beistehen, aufs andächtigest bitten, daß ihm Gott nach Laut dieser Gebet nicht allein von des Teufels Gewalt helfe, sondern auch stärke, daß es müge wider ihn ritterlich im Leben und Sterben bestehen* (BKS, 536.8-20).

³²See below, page 24.

explicit ascription of sin to infants: it does declare “that we all are *conceived and born* sinful and are in need of forgiveness.”³³ In the 1948 agenda we read in the order with sponsors:

This child, then, is also by nature sinful and under the wrath of God. But the Father of all mercy and grace hath promised and sent His Son Jesus Christ, who hath borne the sins of the whole world and redeemed and saved little children, no less than other, from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation.³⁴

In the order without sponsors we read an even more explicit statement:

Little children, though seemingly innocent, are by birth and nature sinful, and without forgiveness would be lost forever.³⁵

The omission of the role of sponsors in renouncing the devil and confessing the faith into which the child is to be baptized may betray a slight collusion with the antipedobaptists who would call such a liturgy a fraud. If sponsors are omitted before the act of baptizing, why introduce them after the fact as is done in this order?³⁶ They may as well be deleted altogether.

What is most objectionable in this order is the absence of the renunciation of the devil. While removing it is not only a patent departure from the received Liturgy of Holy Baptism, it also does not clearly witness to the scriptural doctrine of a denial of any middle ground: one is either a member of the kingdom of God or the kingdom of the devil. That is the reason why the Liturgy of Holy Baptism contained a renunciation of Satan. In the passage in which Christ shows that He Himself cannot be in league with Beelzebul in casting out demons He clearly declares: “the one who is not with me is against me, and the one who does not gather together with me scatters” (Matthew 12:30; Luke 11:23).³⁷ Edmund Schlink enlarges on the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions on this matter:

Until Christ's return both of these kingdoms must never be thought of as static but as in constant opposition, conquering and reconquering, advancing and repelling, holding fast, freeing and, under certain circumstances, recapturing. Through Word and sacrament Christ snatches the slaves of the devil from their enslavement. The devil, on the other hand tempts the freed men and tries to make them his slaves again. *There is no peace and no neutral ground between the two kingdoms. Man is either a member of the devil's kingdom or a member of Christ's kingdom.* This battle is fought with every man as a prize and it is waged on this earth. As the Word and sacraments through which Christ rules are an external Word and earthly elements in the external Word, so the battle of the devil against Jesus Christ,

³³Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Worship Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1984), 91, 100, 105.

³⁴³⁴Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference, op. cit, 1.

³⁵Ibid, 8.

³⁶See below, page 25.

³⁷μή ὦν μετ' ἐμοῦ κατ' ἐμοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μὴ συνάγων μετ' ἐμοῦ σκοπίζει

the exalted Lord, becomes manifest on earth as a conflict centering around Word and sacrament, that is as centering around the church.³⁸

In the M[inister's] initial declaration in the section labelled "For the baptism of adults,"³⁹ the baptizand is told: "by the power of the Word, the Holy Spirit has led you to believe that this new life in Christ is yours." This is problematic in that "power" introduces a confusion of Law and Gospel. It introduces a third element into the understanding of the means of grace. It would have been helpful for our liturgical innovator to have left it as: "by the Word, the Holy Spirit" It is also deficient that liturgical innovator has omitted the ancient use of the Apostles' Creed here in the interrogatory. We may surmise that there was a desire to save the creed for its proper place in the Common Service. The abrenuncio has also been omitted infelicitously.

The retention of the giving of the sign of the cross⁴⁰ is heartening in the light of the fact that the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has removed the sign of the cross from the Morning and Evening Prayers in its official exposition of the Small Catechism:

Daily Prayers

How the head of the family should teach those in his household to pray morning and evening, to ask a blessing and to say grace at meals.

MORNING PRAYER

In the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.⁴¹

Again we can deplore the omission of the adjective "holy" before cross as has been mentioned above.⁴²

The giving of the sign of the cross reads: "Receive the sign of the cross on the head and heart + to mark you as a redeemed child of Christ." It would have been better for the liturgical editors to have kept with the traditional wording in that "child of Christ" is an expression that is not explicitly biblical. The 1984 agenda offers a better contemporary wording: "Receive the sign of the holy cross both upon your forehead + and upon your heart + to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified."⁴³

The votum following the act of baptizing is acceptable in that it ascribes new birth to Holy Baptism and speaks of living in baptismal grace.⁴⁴ An updated version of the original wording as is found in the 1984 agenda would have been preferable.

³⁸Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehnke, Herbert J.A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 197-98; emphasis added.

³⁹See below, p. 24.

⁴⁰*ibid.*

⁴¹David P. Kuske, *Luther's Catechism: The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther and an Exposition for Children and Adults Written in Contemporary English* (Milwaukee: Board for Parish Education Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1982), 16.

⁴²See above, p. 12.

⁴³Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *op. cit.*, 91.

⁴⁴See below, p. 25.

The section labeled “Exhortation” should have come before the interrogatory in order to give the sponsors the opportunity to speak for the child. The intrusion of sponsors at this point in the liturgy seems pointless. Time may have been saved if the pastor secured the promise that is asked for before the baptism in a private consultation in his office.

The concluding prayer appears to follow the modern thinking of making the congregation responsible for the Christian nurture of the child, which obscures the role of the parents and the sponsors:

Make us willing to carry out our responsibilities to those who have been baptized, so that all of us may finally come to the blessed joys of heaven, through Jesus our Lord.⁴⁵

Well, that didn't take too much of our brief hour on Sunday morning, now did it?

CONCLUSION

In his afterward/forward to his little baptismal books of 1523 and 1526 Luther spoke of the “external things” or adiaphora of the received baptismal liturgy:

Now remember, too, that in baptism the external things are the least important, such as blowing under the eyes, signing with the cross, putting salt into the mouth, putting spittle and clay into the ears and nose, anointing the breast and shoulders with oil, signing the crown of the head with the chrism, putting on the christening robe placing a burning candle in the hand, and whatever else has been added by man to embellish baptism. For most assured baptism can be performed without all these, and they are not the sort of devices and practices from which the devil shrinks or flees. He sneers at greater things than these! Here is the place for real earnestness.⁴⁶

However, he did not cut them all in the 1526 edition. The Wisconsin Synod not only cuts ancient, edifying “embellishments” but also casts the entire Liturgy of Holy Baptism as merely an excrescence to the service without the emphasis that is deserving to it.

In short, the Wisconsin Synod liturgy does not extol Holy Baptism as its divine mandate and institution as well as its apostolic instruction warrant. It would have been better to devote an entire Divine Service of a Sunday morning to nothing but Holy Baptism. A return should at least be made to the 1526 Taufbüchlein. The baptismal liturgy as found in the Lutheran Church of Australia offers a refreshing possibility that even the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod could look into for the liturgy of 2020.

⁴⁵See below, p. 25.

⁴⁶*So gedenke nu, daß in dem Täufern diese äußerliche Stücke das geringste sind, als da ist: unter Augen blasen, Kreuze anstreichen, Salz in den Mund geben, Speichel and Kot in die Ohren und Nasen tun, mit Öle auf der Brust und Schuldern salben und mit Cresem die Scheitel bestreichen, Westerhembd anziehen und brennend Kerzen in die Händ geben, und was das mehr ist, das von Menschen, die Tuafe zu zieren, hinzugetan ist; denn auch wohl ahn solchs alles die Taufe geschehen mag und nicht die rechte Griffe sind, die der Teufel scheuet oder fleucht. Er verachtet wohl größer Ding, es muß ein Ernst hie sein (BKS, 536.25-537.8).*

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APPENDIX

Holy Baptism's Liturgy in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

HOLY BAPTISM⁴⁷

This order incorporates Holy Baptism into congregational worship by combining the sacrament of baptism with the confession of sins. Martin Luther said that confessing sins and receiving forgiveness is nothing else than a reliving of baptism. Thus this order provides opportunity not only to baptize but also to recall the lasting blessings of baptism.

A baptism hymn may be sung.

REMAIN SEATED

M: The grace of our Lord + Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

CONFESSION OF SINS

M: Our Savior Jesus Christ commanded baptism when he said: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” All of us are born into this world with a deep need for baptism. From our parents we inherit a sinful nature; we are without true fear of God and true faith in God and are condemned to eternal death. But Jesus took away our sin by giving his life on the cross. At our baptism he clothes us with the robe of his righteousness and gives us a new life. Our sinful nature need not control us any longer. We recall what baptism means for our daily lives as we speak these words:

C: **Baptism means that the sinful nature in us should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.**

M: As baptized children of God we confess our sins:

The congregation may kneel.

C: **Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful, and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I have done what is evil and failed to do what is good. For this I deserve your punishment both now and in eternity. But I am truly sorry for my sins, and trusting in my Savior Jesus Christ, I pray: Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.**

M: God, our heavenly Father, has been merciful to us and has given his only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

The Rite of Baptism continues at the font.

⁴⁷Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1993), 12-14.

SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

For the baptism of children

M: In obedience to the command of our Lord and trusting in his promise, you have brought *this child* to be baptized. Jesus told us: “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” It is in baptism that God grants the new life of forgiveness, joy, and peace to little children. By the power of God’s Word, this gracious water of life washes away sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe.

For the baptism of adults

M: _____, by the power of the Word, the Holy Spirit has led you to believe that this new life in Christ is yours. Now in Holy Baptism the Lord Jesus assures you of your salvation. That you may give public testimony of your faith, I therefore ask you:

Do you believe that you were born in sin and therefore eternally lost?

A: **Yes, I believe.**

M: Do you believe in the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

A: **Yes, I believe.**

M: Do you believe that this Triune God planned and carried out your salvation?

A: **Yes, I believe.**

M: Do you believe that God grants you the forgiveness of sins in Holy Baptism?

A: **Yes, I believe.**

M: Do you desire to be baptized?

A: **Yes, I do.**

M: Receive the sign of the cross on the head and heart + to mark you as a redeemed child of Christ.

The minister applies water to the person presented for baptism as he says:

_____, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The Almighty God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has forgiven all your sins. By your baptism, you are born again and made a dear child of your Father in heaven. May God strengthen you to live in your baptismal grace all the days of your life. Peace be with you.

STAND

EXHORTATION

M: Brothers and sisters in Christ:

Our Lord commands that we teach his precious truths to all who are baptized. Christian love therefore urges all of us, especially parents and sponsors, to assist in whatever manner possible so that _____ may remain a child of God until death. If you are willing to carry out this responsibility, then answer: Yes, as God gives me strength.

C: Yes, as God gives me strength.

M: Let us pray:

Merciful Father in heaven, we thank you for the blessing of baptism by which you offer and grant the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Help us to regard our baptism as the robe of righteousness we are to wear all the days of our life. Look with special favor on _____ and grant *him* a rich measure of your Spirit that *he* may grow in faith and godly living. Make us willing to carry out our responsibilities to those who have been baptized, so that all of us may finally come to the blessed joys of heaven, through Jesus our Lord.

C: Amen.

The Common Service continues on page 16.

The Service of Word and Sacrament continues on page 28.

The Service of the Word continues on page 39.

Emergency Baptism

In urgent cases any Christian may administer Holy Baptism. Apply water to the person and say

I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

If there is time, the baptism may be followed by the Lord's Prayer, or the prayer at the close of the service above, or another suitable prayer.